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Population growth and structure

(Chapter VI of the draft programme
of action of the Conference)

Text submitted by the Chairman, Mr. Nicolaas Biegman (Netherlands) (Working Group II), on the basis of negotiations held on document A/CONF.171/PC/5

Chapter VI

POPULATION GROWTH AND STRUCTURE

A. Fertility, mortality and population growth rates

Basis for action

6.1. The growth of the world population is at an all-time high in absolute numbers, with current increments exceeding 90 million persons annually. According to United Nations projections, annual population increments are likely to remain above 90 million until the year 2015. While it had taken 123 years for world population to increase from 1 billion to 2 billion, succeeding increments of 1 billion took 33 years, 14 years and 13 years. The transition from the fifth to the sixth billion, currently under way, is expected to take only 11 years and to be completed by 1998. World population grew at the rate of 1.7 per cent per annum during the period 1985-1990, but is expected to decrease during the following decades and reach 1.0 per cent per annum by the period 2020-2025. Nevertheless, the attainment of population stabilization during the twenty-first century will require the implementation of all the policies and recommendations in the present programme of action.

6.2. The majority of the world's countries are converging towards a pattern of low birth and death rates, but since those countries are proceeding at different speeds, the emerging picture is that of a world facing increasingly diverse demographic situations. In terms of national averages, during the period 1985-1990, fertility ranged from an estimated 8.5 children per woman in Rwanda to 1.3 children per woman in Italy, while expectation of life at birth, an indicator of mortality conditions, ranged from an estimated 41 years in Sierra Leone to 78.3 years in Japan. In many regions, including some countries with economies in transition, it is estimated that life expectancy at birth has decreased. During the period 1985-1990, 44 per cent of the world population were living in the 114 countries that had growth rates of more than 2 per cent per annum. These included nearly all the countries in Africa, whose population-doubling time averages about 24 years, two thirds of those in Asia and one third of those in Latin America. On the other hand, 66 countries (the majority of them in Europe) representing 23 per cent of the world population had growth rates of less than 1 per cent per annum. Europe's population would take over 380 years to double at current rates. These disparate levels and differentials have implications for the ultimate size and regional distribution of the world population and for the prospects for sustainable development: It is projected that between 1995 and 2015 the population of the more developed regions will increase by some 120 million, while the population of the less developed regions will increase by 1,727 million.

Objective

6.3. Recognizing that the ultimate goal is the improvement of the quality of life of present and future generations, the objective is to facilitate the demographic transition as soon as possible in countries where there is an imbalance between demographic rates and social, economic and environmental goals, while fully respecting human rights. This process will contribute to the

stabilization of the world population, and, together with changes in unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, to sustainable development and economic growth.

Actions

6.4. Countries should give greater attention to the importance of population trends for development. Countries that have not completed their demographic transition should take effective steps in this regard within the context of their social and economic development and with full respect of human rights. Countries that have concluded the demographic transition should take necessary steps to optimize their demographic trends within the context of their social and economic development. These steps include economic development and poverty alleviation, especially in rural areas, improvement of women's status, ensuring of universal access to quality primary education and primary health care, including [reproductive health and family planning services], and educational strategies regarding responsible parenthood and sexual education. Countries should mobilize all sectors of society in these efforts, including non-governmental organizations, local community groups and the private sector.

6.5. In attempting to address population growth concerns, countries should recognize the interrelationships between fertility and mortality levels and aim to reduce high levels of infant, child and maternal mortality so as to lessen the need for high fertility and reduce the occurrence of high-risk births.

B. Children and youth

Basis for action

6.6. Owing to declining mortality levels and the persistence of high fertility levels, a large number of developing countries continue to have very large proportions of children and young people in their populations. For the less developed regions as a whole, 36 per cent of the population is under age 15, and even with projected fertility declines, that proportion will still be about 30 per cent by the year 2015. In Africa, the proportion of the population under age 15 is 45 per cent, a figure that is projected to decline only slightly, to 40 per cent, in the year 2015. Poverty has a devastating impact on children's health and welfare. Children in poverty are at high risk for malnutrition and disease and for falling prey to labour exploitation, trafficking, neglect, sexual abuse and drug addiction. The ongoing and future demands created by large young populations, particularly in terms of health, education and employment, represent major challenges and responsibilities for families, local communities, countries and the international community. First and foremost among these responsibilities is to ensure that every child is a wanted child. The second responsibility is to recognize that children are the most important resource for the future and that greater investments in them by parents and societies are essential to the achievement of sustained economic growth and development.

Objectives

6.7. The objectives are:

(a) To promote to the fullest extent the health, well-being and potential of all children, adolescents and youth as representing the world's future human resources, in line with the commitments made in this respect at the World Summit for Children and in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(b) To meet the special needs of adolescents and youth, especially young women, with due regard for their own creative capabilities, for social, family and community support, employment opportunities, participation in the political process, and access to education, health, counselling and high-quality services in [sexual and reproductive health care];

(c) To encourage children, adolescents and youth, particularly young women, to continue their education in order to equip them for a better life, to increase their human potential, to help prevent early marriages and high-risk child-bearing and to reduce associated mortality and morbidity.

Actions

6.8. Countries should give high priority and attention to all dimensions of the protection, survival and development of children and youth, particularly street children and youth, and should make every effort to eliminate the adverse effects of poverty on children and youth, including malnutrition and preventable diseases. Equal educational opportunities must be ensured for boys and girls at every level.

6.8 bis. Countries should take effective steps to address the neglect, as well as all types of exploitation and abuse, of children, adolescents and youth, such as abduction, rape and incest, pornography, trafficking, abandonment and prostitution. In particular, countries should take appropriate action to eliminate sexual abuse of children both within and outside their borders.

6.9. All countries must enact and strictly enforce laws against economic exploitation, physical and mental abuse or neglect of children in keeping with commitments made under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant United Nations instruments. Countries should provide support and rehabilitation services to those who fall victims to such abuses.

6.10. Countries should create a socio-economic environment conducive to elimination of all child marriages and unions as a matter of urgency, and should discourage early marriage. The social responsibilities that marriage entails should be reinforced in countries' educational programmes. Governments should act against the discrimination against young pregnant women.

6.10 bis. All countries must adopt collective measures to alleviate the suffering of children in armed conflicts and other disasters, and provide assistance for the rehabilitation of children who become victims of those conflicts and disasters.

6.11. Countries should aim to meet the needs and aspirations of youth, particularly in the areas of formal and non-formal education, training, employment opportunities, housing and health, thereby ensuring their integration and participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the political process and preparation for leadership roles.

6.11 bis. Governments should formulate, with the active support of non-governmental organizations and the private sector, training and employment programmes. Primary importance should be given to meeting the basic needs of young people, improving their quality of life, and increasing their contribution to sustainable development.

6.12. Youth should be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. This is especially important with respect to information, education and communication activities and services concerning [sexual and reproductive health], including the prevention of early pregnancies, sex education, and the prevention of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and other sexually transmitted diseases. [Access to, as well as confidentiality and privacy of, these services, must be ensured [with due regard to parental rights and responsibilities].] In addition, there is a need for educational programmes in favour of life planning skills, healthy lifestyles and the active discouragement of substance abuse.

C. Elderly people

Basis for action

6.13. The decline in fertility levels, reinforced by continued declines in mortality levels, is producing fundamental changes in the age structure of the population of most societies, most notably record increases in the proportion and number of elderly persons, including a growing number of very elderly persons. In the more developed regions, approximately one person in every six is at least 60 years old, and this proportion will be close to one person in every four by the year 2025. The situation of developing countries that have experienced very rapid declines in their levels of fertility deserves particular attention. In most societies, women, because they live longer than men, constitute the majority of the elderly population and in many countries, elderly poor women are especially vulnerable. The steady increase of older age groups in national populations, both in absolute numbers and in relation to the working-age population, has significant implications for a majority of countries, particularly with regard to the future viability of existing formal and informal modalities for assistance to elderly people. The economic and social impact of this "ageing of populations" is both an opportunity and a challenge to all societies. Many countries are currently re-examining their policies in the light of the principle that elderly people constitute a valuable and important component of a society's human resources. They are also seeking to identify how best to assist elderly people with long-term support needs.

Objective

6.14. The objectives are:

(a) To enhance, through appropriate mechanisms, the self-reliance of elderly people, and to create conditions that promote quality of life and enable them to work and live independently in their own communities as long as possible or as desired;

(b) To develop systems of health care as well as systems of economic and social security in old age, where appropriate, paying special attention to the needs of women;

(c) To develop a social support system, both formal and informal, with a view to enhancing the ability of families to take care of elderly people within the family.

Actions

6.15. All levels of government in medium- and long-term socio-economic planning should take into account the increasing numbers and proportions of elderly people in the population. Governments should develop social security systems that provide support to elderly people through the encouragement of multigenerational families, and the provision of long-term support and services for growing numbers of frail older people.

6.16. Governments should seek to enhance the self-reliance of elderly people to facilitate their continued participation in society. In consultation with elderly people, Governments should ensure that the necessary conditions are developed to enable elderly people to lead self-determined, healthy and productive lives and to make full use of the skills and abilities they have acquired in their lives for the benefit of society. The valuable contribution that elderly people make to families and society, especially as volunteers and care-givers, should be given due recognition and encouragement.

6.17. Governments, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector, should strengthen formal and informal support systems and safety nets for elderly people and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against elderly people in all countries, paying special attention to the needs of elderly women.

D. Indigenous people[s]

Basis for action

6.18. Indigenous people[s] have a distinct and important perspective on population and development relationships, frequently quite different from those of the populations with which they interrelate within national boundaries. In some regions of the world, indigenous people[s], after long periods of population loss, are experiencing steady and in some places rapid population growth resulting from declining mortality, although morbidity and mortality are

generally still much higher than for other sections of the national population. In other regions, however, they are still experiencing a steady population decline as a result of contact with external diseases, loss of land and resources, ecological destruction, displacement, resettlement and disruption of their families, communities and social systems.

6.19. The situation of many indigenous groups is often characterized by discrimination and oppression, which are sometimes even institutionalized in national laws and structures of governance. In many cases, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in the society at large are a key factor in the ongoing destruction of the ecological stability of their lands, as well as in an ongoing exertion of pressure to displace them from those lands. Indigenous people[s] believe that recognition of their rights to their ancestral lands is inextricably linked to sustainable development. Indigenous people[s] call for increased respect for indigenous culture, spirituality, lifestyles and sustainable development models, including traditional systems of land tenure, gender relations, use of resources and knowledge and practice of family planning. At national, regional and international levels, the perspectives of indigenous people[s] have gained increasing recognition, as reflected, inter alia, in the presence of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and the proclaiming by the General Assembly of the year 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

6.20. The decision of the international community to proclaim an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, to commence on 10 December 1994, represents a further important step towards fulfilment of the aspirations of indigenous people[s]. The goal of the Decade, which is the strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people[s] in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health, is acknowledged as directly related to the purpose of the International Conference on Population and Development and the present programme of action. Accordingly, the distinct perspectives of indigenous people[s] are incorporated throughout this programme of action within the context of its specific chapters.

Objectives

6.21. The objectives are:

(a) To incorporate the perspectives and needs of indigenous communities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the population, development and environment programmes that affect them;

(b) To ensure that indigenous people[s] receive population- and development-related services that they deem socially, culturally and ecologically appropriate;

(c) To address social and economic factors that act to disadvantage indigenous people[s].

Actions

6.22. Governments and other important institutions in society should recognize the distinct perspective of indigenous people[s] on aspects of population and development and, in consultation with indigenous people[s] and in collaboration with concerned non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, should address their specific needs, including needs for primary health care and [reproductive health services]. All human rights violations and discrimination, especially all forms of coercion, must be eliminated.

6.23. Within the context of the activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the United Nations should, in full cooperation and collaboration with indigenous people[s] and their relevant organizations, develop an enhanced understanding of indigenous people[s] and compile data on their demographic characteristics, both current and historical, as a means of improving the understanding of the population status of indigenous people[s]. Special efforts are necessary to integrate statistics pertaining to indigenous populations into the national data-collection system.

6.24. Governments should respect the cultures of indigenous people[s] and enable them to own and manage territories, protect and restore the natural resources and ecosystems on which indigenous communities depend for their survival and well-being, and, in consultation with indigenous people[s], take this into account in the formulation of national population and development policies.

E. Persons with disabilities

Basis for action

6.25. Persons with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of the population. The implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1983-1992) contributed towards increased awareness and expanded knowledge of disability issues, increased the role played by persons with disabilities and by concerned organizations, and contributed towards the improvement and expansion of disability legislation. However, there remains a pressing need for continued action to promote effective measures for the prevention of disability, for rehabilitation and for the realization of the goals of full participation and equality for persons with disabilities. In its resolution 47/88 of 16 December 1992, the General Assembly encouraged the consideration by, inter alia, the International Conference on Population and Development of disability issues relevant to the subject matter of the Conference.

Objectives

6.26. The objectives are:

(a) To ensure the realization of the rights of all persons with disabilities, and their participation in all aspects of social, economic and cultural life;

(b) To create, improve, and develop necessary conditions that will ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and the valuing of their capabilities in the process of economic and social development;

(c) To ensure the dignity and promote the self-reliance of persons with disabilities.

Actions

6.27. Governments at all levels should consider the needs of persons with disabilities in terms of ethical and human rights dimensions. Governments should recognize needs concerning, inter alia, [sexual and reproductive health], including family planning, HIV/AIDS, information, education and communication. Governments should eliminate specific forms of discrimination that persons with disabilities may face with regard to [international migration], [reproductive rights] and household and family formation.

6.28. Governments at all levels should develop the infrastructure to address the needs of persons with disabilities, in particular with regard to their education, training and rehabilitation.

6.29. Governments at all levels should promote mechanisms ensuring the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and reinforce their capabilities of integration.

6.30. Governments at all levels should implement and promote a system of follow-up of social and economic integration of persons with disabilities.